





This cruise line definitely appeals more to the older crowd. They have nice ships but can tend to feel more formal (having dress codes at times) and serve those older crowds. Although, there would be features on the ship that appeal to the younger crowd, if you're looking for super family friendly with a lot of activities (water sliding, rock climbing, waterparks) - this line is likely not for you.



NCL advertises their flexibility at sea with its freestyle cruising approach, giving passengers more freedom to choose among different dining options, activities, and excursions than some traditional cruise lines. Definitely family oriented...it's our 2nd favourite cruise line, but seem to be more expensive than they used to be. They regularly offer 3rd and 4th passenger free.



This cruise line is favored by the younger, rowdier, more energetic crowd, and it's not uncommon to find bachelor and bachelorette parties onboard, as well as large family reunions and group cruises. They are known to be cheaper, but not as good as others when it comes to the ship itself or the customer service. However... they definitely seem to be upping their game. I'd be open to trying them out sometime.



Our favourite cruise line currently for price, experience, and ships. They are always coming out with new ships and currently have the 5 biggest ships in the world. RC is a cruise line with an active vibe that can appeal to the whole family. You can often find "kids sail free" or "3rd and 4th passenger free" sales with this cruise line, leaving you only paying taxes for your kids! (like \$100)



We would love to try one of these cruises on day, but they tend to be quite expensive (like 3-5x more than other cruises we've sailed on), but I've heard they are as good as going to Disney World minus the rides. The shows are really good and the opportunity to meet different Disney characters is a lot easier than visiting the Disney parks. Obviously this line is very kid/family oriented.



This line tends to cater more to adults and older travelers and is less family-focused, with fewer high-energy onboard activities. It offers a classic, refined cruising experience with a slower, more thoughtful pace. Known for excellent service, enrichment programs, live music, and longer, more immersive itineraries, it's a great fit for foodies & music lovers.



This cruise line is based in Italy and definitely gives you a true European feel with its cuisine and experience. If you're looking for a Mediterranean cruise line and want a bit of a different cultural experience, this would be a great option. Although it has amenities for young people and kids (waterslides, pools, kids club), it caters more to an adult audience.



This cruise line has a distinctly European feel and attracts a slightly younger crowd, with an average age around 45. The ships are beautiful and often well-priced, especially as MSC expands in the U.S. We've cruised with MSC a few times and enjoyed the ships and found the food to be quite good. Customer service can be slower and less polished than other lines, but the strong value still makes MSC a solid option for many travelers.



We've heard good things about this cruise line, although seems less family oriented and has less amenities for kids/families. Trendy, modern experience with upscale options. This cruise line offers more haute cuisine and elite choices, such as wine tastings, wellness classes, glassblowing classes, and luxury experiences through its exclusive Lawn Club.

# HELPFUL THINGS TO KNOW

*NOTE: Not every cruise line is the same, but this will give you a general idea as they have many similarities.*



## THE #1 CRUISE QUESTION

Sea sickness hasn't been a big issue for us. We sometimes feel the ship a bit when we first depart or on faster travel days, but it usually passes quickly and often goes unnoticed. Cruises move fairly slowly, especially in the Caribbean and Mediterranean, and these ships are so large they feel more like floating cities than boats.

If needed, ships offer free medication for nausea, and many people use patches or wristbands to help prevent seasickness.

Everyone's experience is different, but if you're unsure, we always recommend starting with a shorter cruise to see how it feels.



## COST

The cost of cruising does **not** include airfare, alcohol, soda, tips, excursions, internet or certain restaurants or activities on the ship. As mentioned, it is easy to cruise without spending a lot of money, but you can spend as much or as little as you want.



## ARRIVE A DAY EARLY

We strongly recommend arriving at your departure port the day before your cruise leaves. Many cruises depart in the afternoon, so it might seem just fine to fly or drive to a port on the morning of departure. But all it takes is a moderate flight delay or a pile-up on the highway to upset those plans. If you're delayed in your arrival at the port, the ship will not wait for you.



## RESEARCH PORT STOPS IN ADVANCE

Although there is no requirement to get off the ship when it ports, you make the most of your vacation by doing a bit of research, knowing what's there and how you want to spend your time. This will help you determine if you want to do your own thing, or book an excursion. Excursions through the ship are usually listed on their website.



## ONBOARDING

When you first board the ship, things can feel a little busy and overwhelming — especially in popular areas like the buffet. Don't let that throw you off. Give it a few hours and the crowds will spread out as people settle in.

One of the first things you'll want to do is complete your safety drill by checking in at your assigned muster station. This is usually done right through the cruise line's app and only takes a few minutes.

Food is available as soon as you board, and the buffet is often the easiest option on embarkation day. Since checked luggage can take a few hours to arrive at your stateroom, be sure to pack a bathing suit in your carry-on in case you want to hit the pool right away — towels are provided by the ship.

Lastly, download the cruise line's app before you sail (or connect once onboard). The app will help you navigate the ship, book shows and activities, view menus, and stay organized throughout your cruise. Be sure to book popular shows and activities as soon as possible, as they can fill up quickly.

# HELPFUL THINGS TO KNOW



## DRINKS

Drink packages are available with most cruise lines. You pay a flat rate and get unlimited booze, or pop, etc.... Or, you can purchase drinks separately. What's free to drink? Juice, milk, coffee, tea, water, and sometimes flavoured waters. (some of these beverages may only be available at set times)



## KIDS PROGRAM

Most kids programming starts at age 3. Typically the kids program runs all day and night, however it usually will close for a few hours at some point in the day. In our experience, it usually closes at 10 pm unless you want to pay and they will watch your kids up to 1am. The program has always been really good, our kids have loved it, and having this option has given us a nice balance of having a great family vacation, while still sneaking in some alone time.



## EXCURSIONS

Sometimes it can be cheaper to book your excursions online or through other websites than to book through the cruise ship. We will often find our own transportation when visiting a port or do our own thing vs. pay the ship for an excursion. However, there are certain locations where it is better to book through the ship, especially if the tour is offering a variety of activities, and transporting you a longer distance. (There is also more assurance that you'll get back on time).

*Example* – In Rome it would have cost \$150 to get a 45 min ride to the Coliseum and then to pick us up 6 hours later if we had booked an excursion. Instead, we paid 3 euro each to take the train to the exact same spot.



## SHIP ACTIVITIES

Some activities on the ship require a booking (i.e. - ice skating). Check out the schedule on the app or in your stateroom newsletter to see the schedule for each day and make sure you book ahead. Other activities are first come first serve and may operate at specific times (i.e. - rock climbing wall, archery, waterslides etc.) If there's a really popular activity, plan to do it sooner than later, this will help guarantee that you can try it!



## DRESS CODE

Every cruise can be different, so check your cruise line's website and/or your reservation, but most cruises also have optional theme nights, especially over dinners in the main dining rooms. If this is your thing...check it out! Example - formal night, white night, 70's night etc... or just wear whatever you want :)



## HURRICANE SEASON

Today's modern cruise ships are built to withstand storms, avoid them, and even outrun them. Cruise companies follow the weather very carefully, changing itineraries, canceling sailings, and working hard to keep passengers and crew out of harm's way. Our first cruises was in September two of our stops were canceled due to hurricane damage. While on the ship we weren't aware of any storms but this is an example of what could example during hurricane season.

## HELPFUL THINGS TO KNOW



### ENJOY AT YOUR OWN PACE

There is SO much to enjoy on a cruise ship and sometimes it can feeling like you might miss out on something. It's okay to not do everything. It's okay if you sit by the pool every single day or enjoy your balcony every morning. Make the most of it at your own pace.



### WHY CRUISE

Because of what the cruise ship offers – accommodations, travel from location to location, great entertainment, high quality food, and activities...it's pretty crazy how cheap it is in comparison to going to a location, paying for a hotel, paying for meals at restaurants, renting a car/taxi etc.... We love the all inclusive element of cruising and have found it to be one of the most economical ways to travel...and we don't spend a whole lot than the price of the cruise which keeps our costs very low.

## HOW TO BOOK YOUR CRUISE

Sometimes it's been cheaper to book right through the cruise line while other times it's not. Do your research and compare prices if you want to get the best deal.

We've used the following sites:

**Norwegian Cruise Line:** <https://www.ncl.com/ca/en/>

**Royal Caribbean:** <https://www.royalcaribbean.com/>

**Prestige Cruises:** <https://www.prestigecruises.com/>

★ **Vacations to Go:** <https://www.vacationstogo.com/>

**Others options:**

<https://www.cruise critic.com/>

<https://www.selloffvacations.com/en/>

<https://www.crucon.com/>

<https://www.cruises.com/>

<https://www.cruisedirect.com/>

## WHAT WE'VE SPENT ON CRUISING

Here's what we've paid in the past for cruises for our family of 4. Keep in mind, we try and jump on deals when we see them, many times not paying for our kids other than \$100 in taxes each and sometimes our cruises have come with onboard credits of \$50-\$200 that we can put towards expenses. We spend very little on board other than the odd specialty drink. Total approximate cost below includes tips and any onboard spending/activities. It does not include flights to the port destination. If we can aim to pay approx. \$60 a day / person, we are happy as this includes lodging, food, activities, entertainment, and transport from port to port.

Cruise Line & Ship	Month	Location	Total in USD (for 2 adults/2 kids)
Costa Cruises   Costa Smeralda (2023)	March	8 Day Mediterranean	\$1830
Royal Caribbean   Independence of the Seas (2022)	December	4 Day Caribbean	\$1000
Royal Caribbean   Independence of the Seas (2022)	January	4 Day Caribbean	\$1350
Royal Caribbean   Adventure of the Seas (2019)	January	7 Day Caribbean	\$1500
Royal Caribbean   Symphony of the Seas (2020)	January	7 Day Caribbean	\$3053
NCL   Norwegian Epic (2017)	January	7 Day Caribbean	\$2017
NCL   Norwegian Escape (2016)	January	7 Day Caribbean	\$2607
NCL   Norwegian Epic (2015)	January	7 Day Caribbean	\$2400